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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000034

SIPDIS

NEA PASS JOHN NALAND

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SUBJECT: PRT ENGAGES BASRAH PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Bocchetti, PRT Team Leader, Director, US
State Department.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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11. (C) Summary. On June 3, PRT Basra met for the first time with the new Provincial Council as a group. PRT acting team leader delivered short remarks to remind Iraqis that U.S. military withdrawal does not mean U.S. withdrawal, and that the U.S. civilian presence will endure so long as the bilateral relationship remains strong. Provincial Council (PC) Chairman Jabbar Amin al-Latif (Da'wa Tanzim) responded positively, proposing that the PRT and the Council jointly develop goals and coordinate across a broader range of committees. Members posed questions on education, economic development and other issues. Council members tell us that, behind the scenes, internal bickering within the Prime Minister's dominant coalition - especially between the Governor's Da'wa Central faction and the PC Chairman's Da'wa Tanzim group - has slowed engagement. End summary.

Explaining the Evolving Relationship

12. (SBU) The PRT leadership, including section heads for economic and essential services, met with the new Provincial Council for the first time in a well-attended meeting held at the PC's downtown offices. More than 20 of the 35 members participated, representing all parties on the PC. In short opening remarks, the acting team leader emphasized that, in accord with the Strategic Framework Agreement, the U.S.-Iraqi relationship will endure as cooperation spreads into many non-security areas. He also explained that MNF-I had elected to make CERP resources available for projects to support Provincial Councils. The PRT and the 2nd Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division already had moved to put this pledge into practice by assembling a package of projects to repair and improve the R-Zero water plant, which provides some 70 percent of Basra's water.

13. (SBU) In introducing section heads, the team leader emphasized that the PRT would like to work broadly with the new PC, with the PRT's individual sections engaging directly with PC committees on essential services and economic development. PC Chairman Jabbar responded that he would like to avoid the "negative" model of interaction employed by the prior PC, in which all communications with the PRT were channeled through the

Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PRDC). He then introduced all the subcommittee chairmen present at the meeting. (Note: the 35-member council has 21 committees.) We noted that new PRT team leader John Naland would arrive in Basra on June 20.

Everyone's Issues

¶4. (SBU) Subcommittee chairmen used the meeting as a platform to lobby for (or at least inquire about) cooperation with the PRT in their area. We attempted to point out areas of past, present and future cooperation without unduly raising expectations. Dr. Mansour Ameen (Da'wa Central), head of the health and environment committee, asked about projects to upgrade hospitals, and projects aimed at women and children. We replied that the PRT is considering whether to support an NGO-led project focused on primary health care. Salman Daoud (Da'wa Central), chairman of the education committee, said that Basra needs 36 new schools a year but the province does have funding for new buildings. Team leader noted that the Coalition had built and refurbished scores of schools in the province, but said that the USG at this time does not plan a major new education initiative.

¶5. (C) Since the new PC contains only one returning member and only a handful with relevant experience in municipal or provincial government, new committee chairmen expressed conflicting perceptions of how PRT and military assistance programs in Basra operate. Mustafa Resan (Da'wa Tanzim), chairman of the Reconstruction Committee, criticized implementation of projects by the Army Corps of Engineers, UK military civil affairs, and the Joint Reconstruction Action Team program, asserting that projects had been initiated without the approval of the previous PC. However, Ismail Ghazi Uda (Iraqi National Accord), the new head of the essential services

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committee and the former Director General for Municipality, intervened and told Resan that all projects had been approved by the previous PC and coordinated with the municipality.

Governor, PC Chair continue rivalry

¶6. (C) The meeting with the Council was constructive and left the impression that, as PC Chairman Jabbar pledged, the new PC is ready to work together and with the PRT. However, other council members tell a more somber tale in which internal infighting has delayed PC efforts to engage. In a meeting at the PRT on June 4, Da'wa Central party member Dayaa Jafar described the adversarial relationship among the State of Law coalition's three member lists - and especially between Da'wa Central and Da'wa Tanzim - which he blamed for the PC's inability to move forward expeditiously. Jafar explained that the three sides remain bitter over the appointment of the provincial government's five executive positions - including the governor and PC chairman - which were decided by the coalition at the national level. The fallout of that decision, he said, was slowing cooperation among coalition members. Jafar, who himself felt entitled to the governorship, resigned his seat in protest several weeks ago.

¶7. (C) On June 6, PC member Dr. Saad Mati Potrous (Christian-designated seat) painted a similar picture of tension within the ruling State of Law coalition. According to Dr. Potrous, PC Chairman Jabar Ameen (Da'wa Tanzim) remains bitter over the choice of Dr. Shiltagh Abud (Da'wa Central) for governor. On June 4, Jabar Ameen allegedly refused a request by Dr. Shiltagh for 17 billion Iraqi dinar from a PC-controlled reserve remaining from a tax on imports that was eliminated after Operation Charge of the Knights. At this point, Dr. Potrous reported, the governor's office has no money. He said Shiltagh would travel to Baghdad on June 7 to discuss the matter with Prime Minister Maliki.

